



Opening Statement by the Minister of Social  
Affairs and Housing of the Republic of Suriname,  
H.E. Hendrik. S. Setrowidjojo at the dialogue with  
the UN Committee for the Rights of the Child,  
January 24, 2007, Geneva, Switzerland

Mr. Chairman,  
Esteemed members of the Committee,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

My delegation is pleased to present the second periodic report on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Suriname to your august Committee. On behalf of the President of Suriname His Excellency Runaldo Venetiaan, we convey our compliments to you for the valuable and important work that you are doing in the interest of children all over the world.

We would like to thank you for the opportunity presented to us and are convinced that this interaction and exchange of views will assist us to deal more capably and effectively with any weaknesses and shortcomings that still exist regarding the full implementation of the Convention.

Allow me at this moment to introduce the members of my delegation to you:

**Mrs. Maltie Algoe** is presently coordinator of the National Health Information System of the Ministry of Health;

**Mrs. Rinette Telting** is acting secretary to the Ministry of Education and Community Development;

**Mrs. Sandhya Soekhoe** is Head of the Bureau for the Rights of the Child, a department of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing;

**Mrs. Faranaaz Pahalwankhan** is Head of the Research and Planning division of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing;

**Mr. Henry Mac Donald** is a human rights attorney and presently the deputy chief of mission at the Embassy of Suriname in Washington DC.

Mr. Chairman,

Our initial report was submitted in February 1998 and the first dialogue was held in May 2000. We are pleased to inform you that the Government has since then continued its efforts to improve the lives of children in Suriname and appreciates the support received from the international community and civil society in this regard.

This report mainly illustrates the progress that has been achieved since the presentation of Suriname's first periodic report (1995 - 2000), however we remain mindful of the various challenges that we continue to face in terms of the full protection of the fundamental rights enshrined in the Convention.

As a developing country with a youthful population, as figures show approximately 40% of the total population, the Government has always taken the implementation of the CRC as one of its major priorities since it believes that the future of the country depends on the well being of its children. It has therefore in the implementation process encouraged close partnerships with the private sector especially those Non Governmental Organizations working for and with children.

Mr. Chairman,

Although the availability of adequate financial and human resources had impeded some of its goals, the Government continued its efforts towards improving the well being of children in Suriname.

The development of a specific policy plan for children in 2002 for a 5-year period was in this regard a major achievement.

During the past years, policy plans have been developed regarding health, education, legal protection and security, people with disabilities, and HIV/AIDS, indicating some of the main priorities of the Government.

Since the HIV sero prevalence rate among pregnant women in the age group 15 - 24 is 1%, the Government evaluated the existing prevention mother to child transmission program. As a consequence this program was revised and the outcome will be implemented shortly.

In order to reduce child mortality and improve maternal health, the Government has drafted the mother and child health care policy and the sexual and reproductive health care policy, focusing on safe motherhood and family planning.

Its commitment towards Early Childhood Development (ECD) has been made visible due to the formulation of a policy plan.

The Government also initiated an essential assessment of the social security provisions in order to measure their effectiveness. The objectives are to re-define and reform the present provision system in a more effective and efficient way.

Continuous cooperation with the UNICEF enables the Government to lay down its priorities and implement specific actions with the aim to increase the well being of children in the country.

Providing young people with educational and practical skills that allow them to cope with several challenges in their development is also one of the Governments priorities. In this regard we are pleased to refer to the implementation of the Basic Life Skills Program.

The Government also finds the participation of young people in social and community affairs of importance and therefore implemented a model of a Youth Parliament. Suriname's participation in the CARICOM Youth Ambassadors Program particularly indicates that young people should get the opportunity to express their beliefs freely and independently, so they can mobilize their peers to think about how to shape their own future.

Mr. Chairman,

Research and data gathering are being enhanced in order to better structure the policies of the Government. Vital surveys such as the General Census (2005) and the Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (2006) provided accurate data on the situation of children and their families.

These new figures are currently being analyzed, and the outcome will ultimately lead to a better understanding of the many uncertainties regarding the actual position of children.

Indeed, efforts are still being made to gather data on a yearly basis. Yet we must admit that these efforts have not yet yielded the expected results. Much data is not yet available or is not sufficiently at hand, therefore we must admit that we are still being confronted with this challenge and it has our full attention.

We can learn from a quick look at some of the available data on child health, that the Government has increased the immunization coverage from 70% in 2000 to 85% in 2004. In 2005 the new immunization scheme including haemophilus influenza vaccine (Hib) and Hepatitis B vaccine was introduced. A start was also made with the elimination of Neonatal Tetanus by immunization of all pregnant women against tetanus.

The infant mortality was stable during the period 2000 - 2004. This was around 20 per 1000 live births and the under 5 mortality was 25 per 1000 live births.

Enrollment in pre - and primary schools have increased over the years, at least if we compare 2003, 2004 and 2005. We also see an increase in the percentage of children completing primary education namely 67% in 2003 compared to 73% in 2005.

However it is alarming that there is a decrease in the percentage of children completing secondary school namely 60% in 2003 compared to 54% in 2005.

Research is necessary to identify the reason for this decrease so that proper measures can be taken.

The number of reported child abuse cases also increased over the years. In 2003 this number was 167 and in 2005, 242.

The Government's initiative to set up a child abuse prevention network, who acts independently, was undertaken to ensure that guidance is provided especially for victims. Other measures such as raising awareness among community on the negative consequences for children who have been abused will be enhanced.

Mr. Chairman,

In order to better understand the numerous and complex problems concerning children and their families in interior areas, situation analyses in these specific locations have been executed. Based on the outcomes, the Government formulated explicit actions to tackle the problems.

Some of these actions are:

- the improvement of the birth registration system;

- the establishment of teams in 2 districts in the interior to promote early childhood development;
- the assurance of primary and secondary health care, almost free of charge;
- the establishment of school health clubs, where children and youth are being informed about critical health issues and healthy life styles;
- the combating of malaria, which resulted in a decrease of the number of malaria cases with 75 % in 2006;
- the enhancement of the quality and availability of education, through the execution of a 3 years program to improve the capacity of the teachers and the construction of primary schools as well as the construction of one secondary school, with support from NGO's.

The flood of May 2006 that affected different parts of the interior resulted in an increase of the existing problems. Availability of health care, education and food were the first things to be effected. The results of a food security and nutrition assessment conducted in October 2006 revealed that 84 - 91% of the households have inadequate food consumption. Households in some Maroon populated areas account for 85% of the very poor consumption categories. One third of the Amerindian households are in the very poor consumption category.



Short term measures that the Government is working on are measures:

- to guarantee that education for the children is continued;
- to guarantee health care for the people;
- to improve or restore food consumption level through implementation of supplementary food program focused on women and children;
- to closely monitor the situation in sentinel sites.

Mr. Chairman,

Legislative reforms are gradually being implemented. Yet we acknowledge that matters should be accomplished much faster.

A clear implementation of the articles 3, 9 and 12 of the CRC, is the approval of legislation in regard to the right of children to be in contact with their parents.

Legislation with respect to the following topics is currently in the pipeline and is shortly to be approved:

- childcare;
- foster children;
- the rights of children to express their opinion.

Specific provisions with regard to children enshrined in the Penal and Civil Code are currently being reformed as well and it is expected that they will be approved rather sooner than later.

With the start of the pilot project "alternative sanctions for youngsters", incarceration of juvenile offenders will be the last measure as provided for in article 37b of the Child Rights Convention. Since July 2005, all juvenile offenders in pre-trial detention receive immediate legal aid from a lawyer within 24 hours.

Mr. Chairman,

While the Government of Suriname recognizes that challenges such as inadequate financial and economic resources have impeded the implementation of some of the core objectives of the Convention, it continues to look for local, bilateral and multilateral cooperation in order to implement its necessary policy objectives.

Suriname is a relatively young democracy, a nation of people coming from all parts of the world; we are diverse but yet strongly united.

While the Government continues to put much effort in the implementation of the provisions of the Convention, it still faces numerous constraints such as:

- how to bring about the necessary development, particularly to the interior areas;
- how to speed up sufficient data gathering;
- how to improve child health and education facilities, particularly in the interior.;
- how to provide adequate legal and social protection for all children.

In conclusion, allow me to quote a phrase from the National Policy Plan that was presented in the National Assembly by the President of Suriname in November 2005.

I quote:

*"Human rights and development are intertwined, because human rights involve respect for humanity, while protecting the opportunity to develop the human potential in a spirit of equality, equivalence, self determination, peace and security. That is how the rights- based approach came into being. This is an approach that admits that economic, social and cultural rights are linked and interdependent and that development can only be achieved when everyone can equally enjoy these rights."*

(end quote).

The afore mentioned statement remains to be the major force behind the vision to improve the situation of all citizens, including our beloved children. We will consequently continue to walk this road.

I thank you very much for your attention and we stand ready to discuss the inquiries and concerns you may have.